

## ***Hobson-Jobson: The East India Company lexicon***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell's *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases* (1886) offers a richly nuanced history of the East India Company. This article argues that the lexicon shows the influence of comparative philology, particularly the work of Friedrich Max Müller. Compiled at the same time as the India Office archives were first catalogued, *Hobson-Jobson* engages with the primary sources of Company history. The article examines both the impact of Asian words and goods on Britain, and the cultural and trading connections between colonies. Through a series of close readings, the article demonstrates that *Hobson-Jobson* offers fresh ways to approach the global networks of Company trade, and personal networks of affiliation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Published nearly thirty years after the abolition of the East India Company, Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell's *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases* (1886) offers an indispensable guide to the linguistic world of the Company. The distinctive, discursive style adopted by Yule and Burnell allows the glosses to expand into scholarly essays and digressions, and the illustrative quotations to grow into narratives. Running to over 1000 double-columned pages, the glossary records

words and phrases that entered English from Asian languages (and vice versa). It includes place names and English words which gained a particular currency in India. No clear rules are established to govern the selection of words; at times the authors' interest appears to be the only guiding principle.

In compiling the glossary, the authors drew on their own experience of India. Arthur Coke Burnell (1840 - 1882) was a member of the Indian Civil Service and a talented linguist, who served as a judge in South India, but devoted much of his time to the study of Sanskrit and South Indian languages. Plagued by ill health, he died four years before the publication of *Hobson-Jobson*. Burnell's linguistic ability complemented Yule's wide-ranging knowledge of Asian history and geography. A former Colonel in the Bengal Engineers, Henry Yule (1820 - 1889) had pursued a varied career in India, working as a surveyor, engineer and diplomat, before taking up scholarly pursuits in retirement. He was responsible for a number of collections of early voyages to the East; most notably, the definitive English edition of Marco Polo's travels, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (1871). The glossary was largely Yule's work; he amassed many of the illustrative quotations, wrote most of the glosses and composed the introduction.

The lexicon was a product of the nineteenth-century interest in comparative philology, a discipline dominated in Britain by the figure of Friedrich Max Müller. In this article I trace the previously unremarked influence of Max Müller on Burnell and Yule. For

Müller, comparative philology provided access to the beliefs and customs of the past. The period of the glossary's compilation coincided with the re-organisation of the India Office archives and the discovery of East India Company papers as a historical resource. I argue that *Hobson-Jobson* emerges from this new engagement with the primary sources of Company history. The glossary also operates on a more intimate level as a record of individual Company lives. Through a close reading of a number of entries, I demonstrate that *Hobson-Jobson* offers us fresh ways to approach the global networks of Company trade and personal networks of affiliation. The complex and multi-layered structure of the text allows us access to a richly textured and sometimes contradictory version of Company history.

In recent years, there have been calls for a re-orientation of imperial history; a shift away from the focus on Britain's impact on the colonies. Catherine Hall and Antoinette Burton, among others, have argued that attention should be directed rather to the empire's influence on Britain. In a parallel move, Alan Lester and Tony Ballantyne have emphasised the importance of imperial networks; that is the circulation of individuals, ideas and resources around the empire.<sup>1</sup> With its pursuit of language around the globe, *Hobson-Jobson* allows us to combine both approaches; to consider both the impact of Asian words and goods on Britain, and the cultural and trading connections between colonies. Typically, historians have cited *Hobson-Jobson* for its definition of terms. In this article, I

want to demonstrate that the lexicon offers a much richer and more nuanced version of Company history than previously acknowledged.

## THE LEXICON WAREHOUSE

The opening sentence of the glossary's introduction establishes a close relation between commercial and linguistic traffic. 'Words of Indian origin', writes Yule, 'have been insinuating themselves into English ever since the end of the reign of Elizabeth and the beginning of that of King James, when such terms as *calico*, *chintz*, and *gingham* had already effected a lodgement in English warehouses and shops, and were lying in wait for entrance into English literature' (Yule & Burnell 1903: xv).<sup>2</sup> The arrival of Asian loan words is dated to the foundation of the East India Company in 1600, and associated with the textiles that formed the Company's early trade. Words and wares here seem virtually interchangeable; the trade in cloth feeds the literary market.

By the early nineteenth century, Company warehouses dominated large areas of East London. Like the glossary, the warehouses were stocked with all manner of Asian goods: tea, cloth, silks, cottons, spices, drugs, chinaware, ivory, shawls and jewels (to name but a few). The massive scale and extent of the London warehouses were a measure of the significance of Company trade to the British economy. As Margaret Makepeace has shown, the East India Company was the single largest commercial property owner in early nineteenth-century London, until the Charter Act of 1833 ended the

commercial activity of the Company, and most of the warehouses were sold off (Makepeace 2010: 25).

The vast repositories of East India Company goods had their counterparts across the globe. If we turn to the entries in *Hobson-Jobson*, we find that various names for warehouses enter the Anglo-Indian vocabulary early on, circulate widely and continue in current use. Amongst its pages we find at least three entries tracing the etymologies of terms for warehouse. The entry for *bankshall* (derived from Sanskrit, through various Indian languages and Portuguese) notes that it 'is in fact one of the oldest of the words taken up by foreign traders in India' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 61). The word *hong* (from the Chinese *hang*, meaning warehouse or factory) was in Canton 'applied to the establishments of the European nations ('Foreign Hongs') and to those of the so-called 'Hong-Merchants' who held the monopoly of trade with foreigners (Yule & Burnell 1903: 421). The term *godown* (derived from Tamil, Malay and Javanese) testifies to the ancient 'intercourse between the Coromandel Coast and the Archipelago' and 'is in constant use in the Chinese ports as well as India' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 381). The etymologies disclose the manner in which Europeans inserted themselves into existing Asian trading networks. Warehouses were of course necessary both at the start and end of any trading voyage; the temporary holding places of goods that would travel - or had travelled - far. In its humble way, the warehouse is an apt figure for

commercial and cultural contact between peoples. It is also a convenient image for the multilingual glossary itself.

Writing in the *Quarterly Review*, Birdwood conceives of *Hobson-Jobson* as a ‘vast storehouse ... of pleasant and recondite erudition’ (Birdwood 1887: 165). In its scale and range of reference, *Hobson-Jobson* is a veritable warehouse of knowledge, a tremendous demonstration of the arts of memory (and annotation). As an obituary of Yule put it: ‘Each of the terms is used as a peg whereon to hang a quaint medley of illustrations and references collected in his miscellaneous reading, and stored till wanted in the chambers of an unfailing memory’ (Trotter 1891: liv). Trotter conceives of Yule’s memory as a storehouse, a commonplace figure for memory. There may be an echo here of Yule’s introductory image of warehouses stocked with Indian goods and words ‘lying in wait for entrance into English literature’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: xv). The East India Company’s London warehouses survive in vestigial form in the memory warehouse of *Hobson-Jobson*. The figure of the lexicon-warehouse is richly suggestive of the multiple connections between language, memory, scholarship and commerce.

## COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY

In compiling *Hobson-Jobson*, Yule and Burnell were greatly influenced by the work of Friedrich Max Müller, Oxford Professor of Comparative Philology. According to Max Müller, the scientific study of language illuminated the historical progress of human

thought, mythology and religion. Language offered the key to connections between cultures. As one of the celebrity scholars of Victorian Britain, Max Müller did much to raise the status of philology. When he was invited to deliver a series of lectures at the Royal Institution on the Science of Language, the royal family attended. Queen Victoria ‘listened very attentively’, Max Müller wrote to his wife, ‘and did not knit at all’ (Chaudhuri 1974: 185).

Max Müller had acted as the young Burnell’s examiner in the Indian Civil Service exams, and it was his encouragement that spurred Burnell in the study of Sanskrit (Yule 1882: 4). Once established as a Sanskrit scholar, Burnell received queries from Max Müller, and procured manuscripts for him in India (Müller 1882: 295). Burnell’s major scholarly publication, *Elements of South Indian Palaeography* (1874), was considered by Max Müller as ‘indispensable to every student of Indian literature’ and Burnell himself, a ‘distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service’ (Müller 1882: 295; 1883: vii). Max Müller romanticised Burnell’s unworldly devotion to research: ‘Dr Burnell is filled with the true love of learning which lifts the scholar above the cheap applause of the many, and rewards him by the satisfaction which he feels himself in his own work’ (Müller 1879: 89). Max Müller’s praise acknowledged his dependence on the work of such unrecognised scholars even as it undercut his own status as celebrated professor.

Max Müller’s influence also extended to Henry Yule. Praising the ‘luminous exposition’ and ‘characteristic learning and grace’ of

Max Müller's writing, Yule engaged with him in scholarly correspondence (Yule 1871: 2: 263). After discovering that Max Müller wished to consult his own *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, but that he did not possess a copy, Yule requested that his publisher, John Murray, send him a complimentary one, to save Max Müller the trouble of a visit to the Bodleian library: 'I think it is a pity a man like him shd have to go to the Bodleian to turn up a book like that (!)' (Yule to Murray, Feb 26 1880, JMA, MS 41319).

Max Müller is cited respectfully in *Hobson-Jobson* a number of times (see, for instance, Yule and Burnell 1903: 89, 285, 445, 694). He should perhaps be considered as the glossary's presiding genius. The ambitious range of Max Müller's intellectual pursuits prepares the way for the encyclopaedic scope of *Hobson-Jobson*. Language provides the means to reconstruct the lost world of the East India Company. In plotting etymologies, the glossary maps out a whole history of Asian-European contact. Like Max Müller, Yule and Burnell read language for clues to human development. An entry on *numerical affixes*, for instance, draws connections between idioms in a wide range of European, Asian and American languages to suggest that they are 'a kind of survival of the effort to bridge the difficulty felt, in identifying abstract numbers as applied to different objects, by the introduction of a common concrete term' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 634). Max Müller's emphasis on the priority of spoken language over the written informed much of Victorian philology. This may account for the lexicon's interest in 'Colloquial



Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases’ (to quote its subtitle) and serve to legitimate *Hobson-Jobson*’s illustration of language use through anecdote and reminiscence.

When Yule and Burnell were still at the early stages of composing *Hobson-Jobson*, an essay appeared that seemed to anticipate their own glossary. In an anonymous 1877 article on ‘The Anglo-Indian Tongue’ in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Alexander Allardyce (assistant editor of *Blackwood’s* and former editor of the *Ceylon Times*) observed that ‘those who read language after the fashion of Max Müller and the other great philologists of the day might shape a very interesting story of the history, the habits and the feelings of the British in India, from the native additions which they have made to their own language’ (Allardyce in Bolton and Kachru 2006: 1: 85). When he read the *Blackwood’s* article in May 1877, Yule was spurred to write to his publisher, John Murray. The article touched ‘so nearly on the subject of the book [...] that [...] it wd be well to secure the field’, he warned. Yule requested that Murray should advertise the glossary as ‘Preparing for Early Publication’, making the rash promise that the book would run to around three hundred pages and be ready by the end of the year (it would actually be published nine years later, at three times the length) (Yule to Murray, 7 May 1877, JMA MS 41319).

Allardyce’s notion that comparative linguistics allowed access to the past was indeed derived from Max Müller. In his *Lectures on the Science of Language* Max Müller made large claims for the role of

the philologist. Nothing less than the history and culture of the world could be read through language. Like the geologist who ‘sees miracles on the high road’, the philologist discovers ‘chronicles’ below the surface of language and reads ‘sermons in every word’ (Müller 1864: 2). Following Max Müller, Yule invoked geology in his introductory account of ‘the organic remains deposited under the various currents of external influence that have washed the shores of India during twenty centuries or more’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: xvii).

Language bears the impress of cultural intimacy far longer than other forms of social practice. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the British in India abandoned Indian clothes, food, furnishings and mistresses (publicly at least), adopting increasingly Anglicised modes of behaviour. But the spread of middle-class mores had a less marked effect on one aspect of the *sahib*’s social practice: his language. From the mid-1830s English displaced Persia as the official language of government in India and was established as the medium of education for Indians, but to speak or to write in India was to pronounce a distance and difference from Britain, to register the transformative effect of contact with Indian cultures. *Hobson-Jobson* looks back to the earlier history of cross-cultural influence and exchange, long since disavowed by the British in India.

In tracing the etymologies of words, Yule and Burnell recover forgotten histories and unexpected cultural exchanges. Thus the word *compound* (the enclosure around an Anglo-Indian house)

derives from the Malay word, *kampong*, and *tiffin* (lunch) turns out not to be Indian at all, but rather a ‘local survivor of an English colloquial or slang term’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: 919). The entry for *chop* (stamp or brand) makes the case that the word is not of Chinese or Portuguese origin as some writers had imagined, but rather derived from Hindi, that ‘it got a permanent footing in the ‘Pigeon English’ of the Chinese ports’ and acquired a variety of meanings (including passport, custom dues, clearance certificate) and returned ‘to England and India in the phrase ‘*first-chop*’ i.e. of the first *brand* or quality’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: 208). As words are transported along the East India Company’s shipping lanes, they are in a constant state of flux, acquiring new meanings and associations, moving up and down the social scale.

## IN THE INDIA LIBRARY

The preface to *Hobson-Jobson*, which functions as Yule’s tribute to the deceased Burnell, relates their first encounter, some time before 1872, at the India Office Library. With its extensive collections of manuscripts and drawings, the India Office Library was both the official repository for records and publications on India and a scholarly library. It seems an entirely appropriate location for Burnell and Yule’s first meeting, for the library was stocked with the archives and texts upon which their joint work is built; that vast body of writing termed by Miles Ogborn ‘Indian Ink’: the records,

maps, correspondence, memoirs, histories, pamphlets, vocabularies and travel accounts that defined India for the British (Ogborn 2007).

During the initial years of their collaboration on *Hobson-Jobson*, neither Burnell nor Yule had regular access to the India Office Library: Burnell was working in South India and the retired Yule was living in Palermo. But in 1875 Yule returned to London where he established himself at the heart of government and scholarly circles dealing with India. Yule was appointed a member of the Council of India and presided over various learned societies, among them the Hakluyt Society, which reprinted editions of early modern travel accounts. Yule's activities placed him in contact with other historians, geographers, linguists and Asian experts with whom he corresponded on problematic *Hobson-Jobson* entries. Among those whose assistance Yule acknowledged in the preface were Sir Joseph Hooker, director of Kew Gardens (who corrected the botanical entries), William Robertson-Smith, professor of Arabic at Cambridge and editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, George Moule, the bishop of mid-China, and Reinhold Rost, India Office Librarian. He was a regular visitor to the India Office Library and his seat on the Council of India gave him a degree of influence over policy decisions.

It was in the 1870s that the India Office started to value its archives as a historical resource and devote serious attention to the preservation and classification of its records. With its distant factories and inheritance of the Mughal system of *kaghazi raj* (rule

by paper), documentation was central to the functioning of the Company. So massive was the bulk of Company papers - the accumulated correspondence, minutes, accounts and bills (often in multiple copies) - that the archives had been regularly culled in the preceding decades; in 1861, for instance, 300 tons of records had been sold off as waste paper. In 1874, Henry Waterfield was placed in charge of the organisation of the records, and in 1879 George Birdwood started to work on the early East India Company material, publishing a *Report on the Old Records of the India Office* that presented the case for the historical significance of the archives. According to William Foster, Birdwood's 'enthusiastic account of these neglected materials' was largely responsible for the establishment in 1884 of a new Registry and Records Department which began the work of cataloguing the early papers (Foster 1919: viii).

Both Waterfield and Birdwood contributed to the composition of *Hobson-Jobson*. In a note on the obscure fiscal term '*sayer*', Yule acknowledged the 'the kind help of Sir H. Waterfield, of the India Office, one of the busiest men in the public service, but, as so often happens, one of the readiest to render assistance' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 798); but his debt to Birdwood was far more extensive. With a breadth of experience and knowledge to match Yule's own, Birdwood was an ideal contributor to the glossary. Beginning his career as a surgeon with the Bombay medical service, Birdwood became a professor of anatomy and botany, then champion of Indian

arts and crafts, and keeper of the India Museum in London. In 1879 Birdwood was appointed Special Assistant in the Revenue and Statistical Department of the India Office, and began work on the seventeenth-century records of the Company. As the glosses in *Hobson-Jobson* testify, Birdwood was in regular correspondence with Yule, supplying definitions and quotations from Company records, providing botanical information and accounts of Indian arts and crafts. He even provided Yule with a whimsical anecdote to illustrate the greeting '*Ram-Ram!*', 'the commonest salutation between two Hindus meeting on the road':

Sir G. Birdwood writes: 'In 1869 - 70 I saw a green parrot in the Crystal Palace aviary very doleful, dull, and miserable to behold. I called it 'pretty poll,' and coaxed it in every way, but no notice of me would it take. Then I bethought me of its being a Mahratta *poput*, and hailed it **Ram Ram!** and spoke in Mahratti to it; when at once it roused up out of its lethargy, and hopped and swung about, and answered me back, and cuddled up close to me against the bars, and laid its head against my knuckles. And every day thereafter, when I visited it, it was always in an eager flurry to salute me as I drew near to it.' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 757)

Birdwood's account works to anthropomorphize the bird and unite home-sick parrot and old India hand through the bonds of exile and language.

With their shared enthusiasm for all manner of things Indian, Birdwood and Yule were obvious allies and powerful supporters of each other's projects. Birdwood lavished praise on *Hobson-Jobson* in two anonymous reviews for *The Athenaeum* and *The Quarterly Review*. 'Colonel Yule represents the ideal glossologist', asserted

Birdwood. 'There is no writer among Anglo-Indians, living or dead, who has attained to his degree of eminence in extent or variety of knowledge, in exactitude of workmanship, in shrewd discrimination of the relative value of the fanciful and the practical, and in the capacity of lucid exposition' (Birdwood 1887: 144). For his part, Yule employed his position on the Council of India to promote the conservation of the India Office records, in line with Birdwood's proposals (Forster 1919: viii).

Yule's advocacy of the Company archives was fired too by his own research. During the final years of compiling *Hobson-Jobson*, Yule was also preparing an edition for the Hakluyt Society of the diary of William Hedges, the East India Company's first Agent and Governor in the Bay of Bengal in the 1680s. So intrigued was Yule by his discoveries in the Company archives that he decided to expand his edition of Hedges' diary to accommodate his findings. Taking advantage of his prerogative as President of the Hakluyt Society, Yule added two more volumes to the original one of the diary. Volumes II and III were only loosely connected with the diary; they documented the lives of Hedges' contemporaries (in particular, Job Charnock, the supposed 'founder' of Calcutta, and Thomas 'Diamond' Pitt), provided a history of the Company's factories in Bengal and furnished charts of the Hugli River. Of the section entitled 'Miscellaneous Papers', Yule wrote with disarming frankness, that it was composed of 'a variety of odds and ends which attracted my own interest whilst searching the records for

more relevant matter' (Yule 1888: 2: 12). For Yule, the India Office records presented an unrivalled opportunity for serendipitous discovery. 'Indeed it seems to myself', observed Yule, invoking Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, 'that these old records are like the cauldron at Camacho's wedding; one has only to plunge in a ladle at random to scoop out something valuable or curious' (Yule 1888: 2: 13). In a gesture familiar from *Hobson-Jobson*, Yule supplied a lengthy quotation from *Don Quixote* to illustrate his point:

'I see no ladle', answered Sancho. 'Stay', quoth the cook, 'Heaven save me, what a helpless varlet!' So saying, he laid hold of a kettle, and sowing it into one of the half-jars, he fished out three pullets and a couple of geese, and said to Sancho: 'Eat Friend, and make a breakfast of this scum, to stay your stomach till dinner-time'. (Yule 1888: 2: 13)

That Yule should illustrate the wonderful plenitude of the Company archives with a reference to Cervantes' romance seems entirely appropriate; Yule's scholarly appetites are as voracious as Sancho's. It could be said that *Hobson-Jobson* itself consumes multitudes of texts: the glossary's Works Cited list extends to some twenty double-columned pages. For the reader, the experience of reading *Hobson-Jobson* is much like following a picaresque novel: full of chance meetings and lengthy digressions; or, to elaborate on Cervantes' image, to browse *Hobson-Jobson* is to dip into a rich linguistic and literary soup.

Much of the meat of *Hobson-Jobson* is supplied by Company records, travel accounts, histories and memoirs. Yule cites John Fryer's travels on behalf of the Company, *A New Account of East India and Persia* (1698) over three hundred times. *Oriental Memoirs*



(1813), by the East India Company servant, James Forbes, provides some 130 quotations. There are over a hundred references each to J. T. Wheeler's *Early Records of British India* (Calcutta, 1879) and the Rev. James Long's *Selections from Unpublished Records of Government (Fort William)* (Calcutta, 1869). Some eighty quotations are furnished both by Yule's own edition of the *Diary of William Hedges* (in manuscript form), and the three volumes of the *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan* (1763, 1778) by Robert Orme, the first official historiographer to the East India Company. In a sense then, *Hobson-Jobson* functions as a digest of a great mass of East India Company writing. The sources are mined not just for examples of language use, but for entertaining narratives and records of past British life in India. However idiosyncratic the individual entries, collectively they build up into an encyclopaedic version of Company life in India.

### ***HOBSON-JOBSON AS COMPANY HISTORY***

For Javed Majeed, *Hobson-Jobson* offers an auto-ethnography of Company life. Majeed suggests that the glossary memorializes the passing of the last generation of East India Company servants to which Yule himself belonged (Majeed 2006: 14). The East India Company's past was indeed very vivid to Henry Yule. A complete collection of portraits of all the governors-general and commanders-in-chief of India decorated the walls - and even the doors - of his London home (Trotter 1891: lv). Yule had grown up with a sense of

the Company and its history. His father, Major William Yule, had served as assistant resident at the courts of Lucknow and Delhi and was something of an orientalist scholar, amassing a collection of Persian and Arabic manuscripts that he later donated to the British Museum. Yule cites his father's writings a couple of times in the lexicon (including a Persian translation on the introduction of tobacco to India, 'a fragmentary note in the handwriting of the late Major William Yule, written in India about the beginning of last century' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 926).

Through its insistently personal manner, *Hobson-Jobson* explores the social and affective aspects of language meaning. Glosses slip into reminiscence, textual examples are provided by family and friends. The entry on *Hooka*, for instance, charts the decline of that most Indianised of bodily practices over the course of the authors' lives:

In 1840 the *hooka* was still very common at Calcutta dinner-tables, as well as regimental mess-tables, and its *bubble-bubble-bubble* was heard from various quarters before the cloth was removed – as was customary in those days. Going back farther some twelve or fifteen years it was not very uncommon to see the use of the *hooka* kept up by old Indians after their return to Europe; one such at least, in the recollection of the elder of the present writers in his childhood, being a lady who continued its use in Scotland for several years. When the second of the present writers landed first at Madras, in 1860, there were perhaps half-a-dozen Europeans at the Presidency who still used the *hooka*; there is not one now (c.1878). (Yule & Burnell 1903: 423)

The dating of the memories – which span the transition from Company to Crown rule – demonstrate that personal reminiscence is

valued as a form of social history. The authors are aware of the gradual disappearance of a way of life and its associated language. As Birdwood notes in his *Athenaeum* review, ‘‘Hobson-Jobson’’ will provide for all time an invaluable and indispensable key to the *argot* of the Anglo-Indian world, more particularly valuable, because those who use it now have forgotten its origin’ (Birdwood 1886: 8).

As a multi-vocal, multi-layered text, *Hobson-Jobson* repays attentive reading. If we are alert to the lexicon’s nuances and silences, to the manner in which illustrative quotations relate to and sometimes contradict the main gloss, we can construct a reading of *Hobson-Jobson* that unsettles imperial certainties and suggests the ambivalence of colonial rule.

One of the entries in *Hobson-Jobson* most closely associated with the establishment of Company rule is *Dewaun*. The first definition of the term offered by *Hobson-Jobson* concerns the Mughal right to collect land revenue: ‘It was in this sense that the grant of the Dewauny to the E. I. Company in 1765 became the foundation of the British Empire in India’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: 309). But this inherited Mughal office, a foundational term of Company rule, ‘has many other ramifications of meaning and has travelled far’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: 309). Yule follows the Arabic/Persian word *dīwān* on its travels, as it is applied to registers, accounts, books and collections of poems, to councils, courts and couches. The word then enters European literary territory:

It seems to be especially applied to assemblages of short poems of homogeneous character. Thus the *Odes* of Horace, the *sonnets* of Petrarch, the *In Memoriam* of Tennyson, answer to the character of *Dīwān* so used. Hence also Goethe took the title of his *West-Östliche Diwan* (Yule & Burnell 1903: 310).

Yule reimagines the canonical work of European poets, ancient and modern - including the current British Poet Laureate - in Persian/Arabic form. The circulation of language and the model of Goethe's 1819 *West-Östliche Diwan* (*West-Eastern Divan*), seem to invite the cross-cultural comparison. Indeed the transformations and travels of the word *dīwān* suggest something of the scope of the glossary as a whole; ranging from revenue collection to domestic furniture, from the Mughal and Ottoman empires to Britain, from colonial administration to literary form.

With the adoption of the role of *dīwān*, the Company assumed responsibility for the collection of revenue. At district level, the chief official was termed the Collector, probably a direct translation, the glossary informs us, of the Mughal office of *taḥṣīldār*. The illustrative quotations supplied for the term *Collector* allow the reader to understand the new authority, financial rewards and esteem of the office; at the same time, they comically highlight the social aspirations and vulgar pretensions associated with the post. In 1773 Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal, explained the need for a change in nomenclature in a letter to Josias Du Pre, Governor of Madras: 'Do not laugh at the formality with which we have made a law to change their names from *supervisors* to

collectors. You know full well how much the world's opinion is governed by names' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 235). The prestige of the role is evident in a passage extracted from Julia Maitland's account of Company officials in *Letters from Madras* (1843): 'As soon as three or four of them get together they speak about nothing but 'employment' and 'promotion' [...] and if left to themselves, they sit and conjugate the verb 'to collect': 'I am a *Collector* – He was a *Collector* – We shall be *Collectors* – You ought to be a *Collector* – They would have been *Collectors*' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 235). Rarely has the grammar of social aspiration been expressed so concisely as in this new-minted conjugation of the phrase 'to be a Collector'. The avidity with which Company Servants vie for position and financial gain is matched in the next quotation by the eagerness of Becky Sharp, social-climbing heroine of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), to catch the returned Indian Collector, Joe Sedley. Joe's unsuspecting mother 'could not bring herself to suppose that the little grateful, gentle governess would dare to look up to such a magnificent personage as the Collector of Boggleywallah' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 235). The illustrative quotations offer a satirical commentary on the role of the Collector, a sly counterpoint to the formal definition offered by the main gloss.

*Hobson-Jobson* often argues its case through literary texts. Take the entry for *Tea*, for example. The most significant of the Company's imports to Britain, tea became an established part of domestic culture over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries. The glossary maps this process of acculturation by noting the changes in the pronunciation of the word ‘tea’, turning for evidence to the rhyming couplets of eighteenth-century verse. At the start of the century, the word was pronounced following the Chinese Fujian dialect as ‘tay’, to rhyme with ‘obey’ and ‘pay’, as in lines quoted from Pope and Gray. But by mid-century, ‘tay’ was superseded by the modern pronunciation, as demonstrated by rhyming couplets from Edward Moore (‘tea’ and ‘Mrs P’) and Samuel Johnson (‘me’ and ‘tea’) (Yule & Burnell 1903: 905). The Anglicisation of ‘tea’ is complete, a subsequent entry shows, when the word, *teapoy*, a term for a three-legged table derived from the Hindi *tīn*, three, and the Persian *pāē*, foot, ‘is often in England imagined to have some connection with *tea*, and hence, in London shops for japanned ware and the like, a *teapoy* means a tea-chest fixed on legs. But this is quite erroneous’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: 910). So thoroughly naturalized a word is *tea*, that English speakers associate the word (and drink) with the entirely unrelated small table. Such cross-cultural mistakes of sound association abound in *Hobson-Jobson*: meaning is frequently distorted as words travel across cultures.

The pleasure taken by Yule and Burnell in pointing out general misconceptions is matched by their delight in the unexpected etymologies of commonplace words. The entry for *Tea Caddy* is one such example. ‘This name, in common English use for a box to contain tea for the daily expenditure of the household, is probably

corrupted [...] from catty'; that is, the Malay *kati*, a measure of weight used in the Chinese tea trade. Few terms show the extensive reach of Company trade as clearly as the humble tea caddy. The language of imperial commerce not only enters the kitchen, but the everyday speech of women and the servants of the house. In a typical aside, Yule adds that tea caddy 'was a Londoner's name for Harley Street, due to the number of E.I. Directors and proprietors supposed to inhabit that district' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 909). The sobriquet undercuts the pretensions of Company grandees and acts as a reminder of the trading origins of their wealth. In its small way, the name serves to re-orientate the map of London towards Asia.

A staunch upholder of Company tradition, Yule was in many ways eager to defend the reputation of its leading figures. Take the person of Robert Clive, for example, lauded in the nineteenth century as an imperial founding father and military hero. Clive makes an unexpected appearance in the glossary in the illustrative quotations for the entry for *Writer*, the term for a junior Company clerk. A manuscript letter of 1747 from the Fort St. David Council, preserved in the India Office archives, provides evidence of the young Clive's military flair: 'Mr. ROBERT CLIVE, Writer in the Service, being of a Martial Disposition, and having acted as a Volunteer in our late Engagements, We have granted him an Ensign's commission' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 973). This version of the valiant Clive is one that the glossary appears keen to maintain. The entry for *Plassey*, the battle that conventionally dates the start of

Company rule, provides the occasion for a defence of Clive's military prowess. A quotation from the Dutch writer, Johan Splinter Stavorinus, which asserts that Clive 'remained hid in his palankeen during the combat' elicits the comment: 'This stupid and inaccurate writer says that several English officers who were present at the battle related this 'anecdote' to him. This, it may be hoped, is as untrue as the rest of the story. Even to such a writer one would have supposed that Clive's mettle would have been familiar' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 717). However, the fact that such an account is even cited (if only to be countered) raises an element of doubt over Clive's heroic status. The glossary does not entirely neglect the contemporary allegations of financial impropriety and abuse of power directed at Clive. Under the entry for *Nabob*, the Anglicised form of the Hindi *Nawab*, the derisive name for rich, corrupt Company servants, we read that 'the transactions of Clive made the epithet familiar in England, to Anglo-Indians who returned with fortunes from the East' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 610).

Through such hints does the glossary suggest the possibility of British misconduct. If we are to read the glossary for a history of the Company, we must be attentive to such matters of emphasis and nuance; we must notice what is stated, what is implied and what is elided. Take, for instance, the entry for the word *Puckerow*, a British soldiers' term meaning 'to lay hold of (generally of a recalcitrant native)' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 735). The definition implies both British violence and Indian resistance. The gloss notes that



*puckerow*, like many Anglo-Indian verbs, converts a Hindustani imperative, *pakṛānā*, into an infinitive. While semantic and syntactic shift are well-known phenomena in linguistic borrowing, the transformation of the imperative into the infinitive reveals both the British habit of command and, because the imperative is in the ‘familiar’ form, the habit of disrespect.

British military conduct is again brought into question by the entry for the term, *Loot*, derived from the Hindi *lūt*. Yule dates the increased English familiarity with the word - and the practice - to three major British campaigns in the East: ‘between the Chinese War of 1841, the Crimean War (1854-5) and the Indian Mutiny (1857-8), it gradually found acceptance in England also, and is now a recognized constituent of the English *Slang Dictionary*’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: 520). This observation is corroborated by a quotation from the admiral and astronomer, William Henry Smyth, who comments in 1864: ‘When I mentioned the ‘looting’ of villages in 1845, the word was printed in italics as little known. Unhappily it requires no distinction now, custom having rendered it rather common of late’ (Yule & Burnell 1903: 520).

In his discussion of the naturalization of the term ‘loot’, Yule refers to the 1841 conflict as the Chinese War, rather than the Opium War, as it was more commonly known. This small choice points to the glossary’s conspicuous silence on the Company’s involvement in the production of opium. The article on *Opium* does not mention the Company’s monopoly on the cultivation of the drug,

nor does it discuss the Company's arrangement with private British traders to smuggle opium into China, in defiance of Chinese imperial prohibition. Indeed the entry's final illustrative quotation is dated 1770, three years before the Company assumed the opium growing monopoly in Bengal.

While the glossary draws a veil over the Company's production of opium, it does mention Company involvement in the slave trade, albeit obliquely. The lexicon includes an entry on *Slave*, although the gloss is strikingly brief: 'We cannot now attempt a history of the former tenure of slaves in British India, which would be a considerable work in itself. We only gather a few quotations illustrating that history' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 846). The comment at once suggests the extent of Company involvement and displays a marked reluctance to engage with the subject. Responsibility is placed with the reader to sketch an outline from the evidence provided. From the illustrative quotations, the reader learns of British ownership of slaves at Calcutta and Bombay, and of the Company's purchase and transportation of slaves from Madagascar to work on plantations in Sumatra.

It is from the articles on trading goods and currency that the reader can piece together the Company's connections with the West African slave trade. Among the various forms of cloth traded by the East India Company were *Guinea-Cloths* which, the glossary informs the reader, were 'bought in India to be used in the West African trade' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 401), and *Madras*, 'large

bright-coloured handkerchiefs, of silk warp and cotton woof, which were formerly exported from Madras, and much used by the negroes in the W. Indies as head-dresses' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 534). The entry on *Cowry* notes that the small white shells from the Maldives, valued as currency in South Asia and Africa, were 'at one time imported into England in considerable quantities for use in the African slave-trade' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 270). The East India Company sold cowries at auction in London, and the shells, as a 1749 quotation informs us, were known in England as 'Blackamoor's Teeth' (Yule & Burnell 1903: 271). The metaphorical conflation of shells with human teeth leaps from the page; rarely has the casual violence of the slave trade and its connection with the East India Company been expressed with such economy and force. It is from such details that we can begin to reconstruct the East India Company world. The individual instances may be small, but they open up for us the Company's traffic in language and commodities.

## CONCLUSION

*Hobson-Jobson* is the product of a very particular context and set of influences. Animated by confidence in the power of comparative philology, the plenitude of the India Office library and the value of the authors' personal experience, the glossary builds to a comprehensive linguistic and cultural lexicon of the East India Company. With its dual authorship, multiple contributors and

extensive network of reference, *Hobson-Jobson* offers a multi-layered and multi-vocal history of the Company. As it pursues the lives and journeys of words, it also documents the passage of goods and the careers of individuals. Alexander Allardyce was truly prescient when he wrote the Blackwood's article that caused Yule some concern as an anticipation of the glossary itself; the philological study of the Anglo-Indian tongue did indeed amount to a social history of the 'habits and feelings' of the British in India (Allardyce in Bolton and Kachru 2006: 1: 85).

But *Hobson-Jobson* is also of contemporary relevance. Many of the words in the lexicon remain in current English use (*shampoo*, *bungalow*, *dinghy*, *shawl* and *bangle*, to name but a few). By reminding ourselves of the lives of these words, we acknowledge the long history of relations between Asia and Europe and the impact of British colonial power on the English language. Indeed, *Hobson-Jobson* was used as the title of a 2015 exhibition by Glasgow-based artist, Hardeep Pandhal to frame his 'research into processes of translation, uneasy humor and his interest in histories of identity and difference' (Pandhal 2015). As Carol Gluck comments, 'words are always in motion, and as they move across space and time, they inscribe the arcs of our past and present' (Gluck & Tsing 2009: 3). The lexicon demonstrates that cultures constantly meet and refashion one another. *Hobson-Jobson* reveals a narrative of cross-cultural influence and exchange that now, more than ever, we would do well not to forget.

## NOTES

1. For the empire's impact on Britain, see Hall (2002), Burton (1998). For imperial circuits see Lester (2001), Ballantyne (2002).

2. The first edition of Hobson-Jobson included a supplement of 118 pages. The supplement was integrated into the main body of the text when William Crooke brought out a second edition of the glossary in 1903. All additional material included by Crooke was marked with square brackets. It is the 1903 edition that has been most widely reprinted. For this reason, I refer to the 1903 edition throughout the article.

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